

Federal Highway Administration

Context Sensitive Solutions **Current and Recently Completed Program Activities**

Updated September 15, 2006

This report summarizes the current and recently completed activities of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) program. These are CSS focused efforts being pursued in support of achieving the FHWA Vital Few Goal of improving environmental stewardship and environmental streamlining. CSS offers agencies the concepts and strategies to reach a consensus on transportation improvement solutions through the balancing of multiple objectives and stakeholder desires (*e.g.*, safety, mobility, environmental, financial, land owner, and community values).

This summary includes the CSS related projects and activities that are being sponsored or championed by the FHWA Offices of Federal Lands Highway, Infrastructure, National Highway Institute, Planning and Environment, Research, Resource Center, and Safety. For additional information about these activities contact the manager identified for each project. FHWA CSS program and policy information is available at <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/csd/index.cfm>
This report is updated quarterly.



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Context Sensitive Solutions - Program Activities

I. Planning

- A. Workshops on Linking Planning and NEPA** - FHWA and FTA are offering an opportunity to foster change in the culture that underlies transportation planning and project development. Linking Planning and NEPA: Towards Streamlined Decision Making is a two part series of facilitated interaction involving: 1) identification of the current process for performing planning and NEPA studies in support of project-level decisions, and 2) development of strategies for achieving greater integration in this work. It will help participants - both state and federal resource agencies - work together in building a framework for decision making in project development that ensures quality through a clear sequence of decisions made with the right information by people at each decision point.

The Linking Planning and NEPA series is offered in two complementary sessions: a four-hour, facilitated, inter-agency Executive Seminar and a three-day Manager's Workshop. At the end of the Executive session, the executives will develop a "charge for process change" to their staff that will be participants in the subsequent Managers Workshop. The product of the Managers Workshop will be an Action Plan of steps to bring about better planning and decision-making, environmental stewardship and streamlined delivery of transportation projects. More than 20 workshops have been presented thus far. More are planned FY 2006. One of the tools that can be used to bring together planning and NEPA is CSS. CSS may be referred to in the discussion of environmental stewardship, agency's missions or in the Action Plan. FHWA contact: robert.ritter@dot.gov

- B. Questions and Answers - Context Sensitive Solutions in the Transportation Planning Process** is a set of frequently asked questions and answers which highlights several illustrative approaches, techniques, and practical application examples for reflecting CSS considerations in transportation planning. These Q&As address issues such as: how CSS principles can be reflected in transportation planning; current examples for applying CSS principles in transportation planning; and the potential for CSS to help streamline transportation decision making. Access at <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/csd/cssqa.cfm> FHWA contact: danyell.diggs@dot.gov

- C. Integration of CSS in Transportation Planning-** FHWA is working with the North Carolina State University Center for Transportation and the Environment to investigate the integration of CSS into the transportation planning process. Expected deliverables will include a literature review on context sensitive solutions and planning, an assessment of context sensitive solutions as applied to planning, a tool-kit of fact sheets and brochure for both States and communities, and a report on recommendations on ways to incorporate CSS into transportation planning based on research and case evaluations. FHWA contact: danyell.diggs@dot.gov

- D. Land Use and Transportation Integration** – Approaches to linking land use and transportation reflect a holistic view of development. From a transportation perspective, "smart growth" includes planning that better coordinates land use and transportation; accommodates pedestrian and bike safety and mobility; provides and enhances public

transportation service; improves the connectivity of road networks, and; takes a multi-modal approach to transportation with supportive land use development patterns to create a variety of transportation options. The federal-aid transportation planning program supports efforts to coordinate land use and transportation decision-making and to foster ‘smart growth’. For more information, <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/ppasg.htm>

- a. **Transportation Community Systems Preservation Pilot Program (TCSP)** has funded transportation and land use projects that have incorporated CSS elements. The Houston Main Street Project is one of the projects that have been funded through this pilot program. FHWA contact: kenneth.petty@dot.gov
 - b. **Tool Kit for Integrating Land Use and Transportation** - The objective of this tool kit is to provide a user-friendly, web-based source of methods, strategies, and procedures for integrating land use and transportation planning, decision-making, and project implementation. For more information, <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/landuse/index.htm>
 - c. **Land Use and Transportation, NHI Course No. 151043** – This three day course is being designed to help practitioners develop a multi-modal transportation system that supports desired land uses and helps shape land uses to support the transportation system. The course will assist participants in understanding the relationships between transportation and land use; the processes through which transportation and land use issues can be jointly addressed, and; implementation steps to ensure that transportation and land use systems are designed in a compatible, mutually supportive manner. Expected availability late 2006. FHWA contact: jodi.mccullough@dot.gov
- D. Scenario Planning** - In 2004, FHWA began implementing a strategic initiative to: “Promote scenario planning and other innovative approaches to improve the quality of statewide and metropolitan transportation plans and programs.” Scenario Planning is a collaborative process and involves all stakeholders including the general public and local officials in developing alternatives to the future consequences of growth. The result is transportation projects that are better integrated aesthetically and environmentally into the communities they serve. Through this initiative the FHWA is helping to identify opportunities for the use of scenario planning and providing technical assistance for transportation planning applications. FHWA is outreaching to State DOTs and MPOs to explore specific actions to identify the consequences of growth using scenario planning in the transportation planning process. To support this initiative, FHWA is sponsoring a series of Peer Workshops to promote the understanding, awareness of and tools for scenario planning applications in the transportation planning and decision making process. Among the topics discussed in these Peer Workshops include CSS concepts as a product of future growth scenarios. FHWA contact: jodi.mccullough@dot.gov
- E. Executive Order 13274 *Environmental Stewardship and Transportation Infrastructure Project Reviews***. This EO established an Interagency Task Force to advance current DOT and interagency environmental stewardship and streamlining efforts, to coordinate expedited decision-making related to transportation projects

across federal agencies, and to bring high-level officials to the table to address priority projects. The Task Force established an interagency Work Group on Integrated Planning, which recognized the continuing need to more effectively "link" short and long-range transportation planning and corridor level planning studies performed by state and local governments with resource agency and land use planning processes, and with project-specific environmental reviews, approvals, and permitting processes. The Integrated Planning Work Group Baseline Report and Preliminary Gap Analysis Deliberative Draft March 15, 2005 is available at <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/stewardshipeco/planning.htm>

- F. ***The Ecologic Guide:*** Written by a Steering Committee composed of 9 Federal Agencies, will be posted soon at the FHWA Streamlining and Stewardship web page for "what's new" <http://environment.fhwa.dot.gov/strmlng/es2whatsnew.htm>. The purpose of this guide is to make infrastructure more sensitive to wildlife and ecosystems through greater interagency cooperative conservation. This document will have a large number of timely references.

II. Design

- A. ***Context Sensitive Solutions in Designing Major Urban Thoroughfares for Walkable Communities*** –The Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) has published this report as a proposed recommended practice in cooperation with The Congress for New Urbanism, EPA and FHWA. A key feature of this report is that it recommends an approach that uses context zones, thoroughfare types, and functional classification in the planning and design of the traveled way, roadside and intersections. It also provides guidance on how CSS can be applied in the network or corridor planning of urban thoroughfares. This document and supporting materials can be accessed at <http://www.ite.org/css>. Printed copies can be ordered from the web site for a nominal fee. Companion fact sheets and a presentation were developed to assist in conveying the contents and recommended practices. Readers are encouraged to submit written suggestions for improving this report to Lisa Fontana Tierney, ITE, 1099 14th St. NW, Suite 300 West, Washington DC 20005-3438, fax 1-202-289-7722, or e-mail ltierney@ite.org. Written suggestions are due by Dec. 31, 2006 to ensure consideration for incorporation into the final recommended practice report. FHWA contact: keith.Harrison@dot.gov and barbara.bauer@dot.gov
- B. ***Safety Consequences of Flexibility in Highway Design – NCHRP Research Project 15-22 - This project*** conducted case studies of 22 projects that applied flexibility in highway design and evaluated the safety consequences of these applications through before-after crash analysis, expectation analysis (i.e., what changes in crash types might be expected versus what were observed), and expert panel analysis. Quoting the authors, "In summary, it appears that the applications of flexible design studied were minor variations from the typically used designs and the safety consequences were minor. The case studies evaluated as part of this research tended to be representative of the conservative and safe approach taken by designers when considering values that vary from the traditional design." The project final report is available for loan from the NCHRP by contacting Charles W. Niessner, cneissner@nas.edu

- C. *Highway Safety and Trees: The Delicate Balance*** – To further explore the issue of the safe placement of trees along our country's roadsides, FHWA announces the availability of this 12 minute video. This video encourages highway agencies and the public to work together to improve safety while minimizing damage to the environment. It stresses that the design of highway projects should be a cooperative effort involving the highway agency, concerned communities, organizations, and individual citizens. Use this video to initiate a dialogue. The video provides an opportunity for all parties to recognize the benefits and risks associated with trees and discusses many solutions from roadway relocation to use of guardrail to removal of trees from the most hazardous locations. No single solution is appropriate for all situations and every potential solution deserves discussion. To request copies, contact report.center@dot.gov , FHWA contact: nick.artimovich@dot.gov
- D. *Context Sensitive Roadway Surfacing Selection Guide*** – Traditionally, roadway surfacing selection has been based on providing the highest level of functionality, strength, and safety at the lowest possible cost. However, an innovative selection process is now available that specifically considers environmental impacts, cultural sensitivity, and aesthetics while also facilitating and encouraging public input. Developed by the Federal Lands Highway Division, the Guide's selection process permits a balanced consideration of engineering and environmental factors and better ensures that the completed roadway enhances or is at least compatible with the surrounding landscape. The Guide also includes two very impressive tools: 1) A catalog of more than 50 surfacing types that provides information on life expectancy, appearance, cost, construction process, and much other information; 2) A photo album that contains photos of the surfacing types in an appropriate context as well as general descriptions, pros and cons, and other summary information. 1-day workshops on the Guide are available. The Guide can be downloaded at: http://www.cflhd.gov/techDevelopment/completed_projects/pavement/context-roadway-surfacing/. FHWA contacts: brad.neitzke@dot.gov , roger.surdahl@dot.gov , and michael.voth@dot.gov

III. Maintenance

- A. *Best Practices CD on Road Weather Management*** – The CD captures a variety of traffic, emergency, and maintenance management practices that alleviate the impacts of weather. The best practices were obtained through interviews with state and local practitioners. Each of the practices includes information on the applications, results, lessons learned and contacts. The CD can be requested at: http://www.nawgits.com/fhwa/rw_mgt_cd_req.html. FHWA contact: paul.pisano@dot.gov
- B. *Fundamentals of Road Weather Management, NHI Course No. 137030A*** – A one-day course is being developed to introduce transportation decisions makers to the basics behind road weather information systems and the ways that they can be applied to address a host of weather-related problems. Topics include: road weather problems, meteorology for the non-meteorologist, technology resources and implementations, and case studies. The course is available for delivery. FHWA contact: paul.pisano@dot.gov

IV. Advancing CSS State-of-the-Practice: Training and Technical Assistance

- A. CSS Technical Assistance – FHWA Resource Center** – Members of the Environmental and Safety/Design Technical Service Teams have led workgroups to achieve both program and project-specific CSS goals. Examples include: Illinois DOT strategic planning session on CSS performance measurement and the development of training and policy objectives; Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority design charrette and facilitated stakeholder meetings; Oregon DOT design charrette for the I-5 Delta project; Virginia DOT and Scenic 340 stakeholder workshops on the development of project-level CSS objectives and agency-wide policy guidance. Team members are available to consult on the implementation of CSS principles in real-world scenarios, safety, planning, environment and design. FHWA contacts: klynn.berry@dot.gov and keith.Harrison@dot.gov
- B. CSS Training Delivery – Univ. Of Kentucky Course** – This training course provides a three-day overview of CSS. The primary goal is to sufficiently familiarize project development staff and consultants with CSS and enable a continued approach to the awareness of the wide array of issues impacting development and transportation. In addition, a secondary goal is to achieve a general consensus or buy-in by high level staff that CSS was a necessary and desirable procedure to implement for project development. Since 1999, this course has reached 1,700+ people in 17 states. Primarily targeted to reach state DOT employees, in FY 2006, the audience has been extended to include a MPO. FHWA contact: keith.moore@dot.gov
- C. FHWA CSS Training Course (NHI Course #142050)**– The purpose of this introductory course is to provide participants with a general appreciation and understanding of the key concepts, techniques, institutional issues, opportunities and other issues to consider associated with integrating context sensitive solutions into all phases in the planning, development, design, and implementation of transportation improvements. Presentation of the course will be in an interactive format so that the participants are actively involved in the learning experience. This three-day course is currently available. For scheduling . contact: nhitraining@dot.gov
FHWA contact: barbara.bauer@dot.gov
- D. CSS Training Delivery – FHWA Resource Center** - Members of the Environmental and Safety/Design Technical Service Teams provide training tailored to the needs of individual states and/or projects. After becoming aware of the general principles and processes of CSS through the two- or three-day curricula mentioned above, many groups will wish to “drill-down” to the next layer of CSS techniques available to them. Training on specific topics can be developed on an as-needed basis. Examples include the presentation of “cut-and-cover” design techniques to address potential impacts to the Government Hill neighborhood in Anchorage, Alaska and in the incorporation of Community Impact Assessment in CSS for the Idaho Department of Transportation. In addition to more detailed training topics, team members provide overview presentations of shorter lengths to executive leadership, MPOs, professional conferences; elected officials; or other transportation officials whose schedules do not allow participation in a multi-day course. FHWA contacts: klynn.berry@dot.gov and keith.Harrison@dot.gov

- E. Integrating CSS Into University Curricula** – The Center for Transportation and the Environment (CTE), based at North Carolina State University, working in conjunction with FHWA will develop a university-based CSS course. The purpose of the initiative is:
- To create an academic network identifying opportunities to promote the integration and implementation of CSS principles in current and future transportation curricula.
 - To develop and implement a Context Sensitive Solutions course for civil engineering and planning students enrolled in undergraduate studies, complementing a previous effort that targeted graduate students. The development of the supporting academic network and curriculum has a projected delivery date of 2006. FHWA contact: keith.moore@dot.gov
- F. CSS Clearinghouse Web Site Development** – Funding for the continued development and maintenance of a web-based resource center entitled “Context Sensitive Solutions.Org.” This resource center is being developed in partnership with Project for Public Spaces through an existing cooperative agreement with the National Park Service. The website is available to the public, targeting the novice CSS practitioners as well as advance CSS experts. This clearinghouse website is to serve as THE source to nationally access CSS information and resources. It is being developed to provide information on successful practices, locate technical resources, ask your peers a question, find training and exchange information. The content posted and services supported will be based on what is provided by practitioners for posting. FHWA contact: keith.moore@dot.gov
- G. CSS Pooled Fund Study** – The purpose of this activity is to provide a mechanism for agencies to pool their resources to develop technical resources and services to assist practitioners with advancing the integration of CSS within their agencies and projects. The intent of the CSS PFS is for the funding provided by agencies to go 100% into the development of the projects and activities the members collectively support. FHWA contact: jon.obenberger@dot.gov
- H. AASHTO CSS Excellence Awards** - AASHTO's Center for Environmental Excellence held the 2005 National Competition for Best Practices in CSS. The competition showcased outstanding examples of the work being done throughout the US to integrate CSS principles with the planning and delivery of transportation projects, programs and services. In keeping with the Center's desire to identify best practices and to share the information, all entries were profiled on the Center website. The winners for each category were showcased in a report and presented with awards during the AASHTO 2005 Annual Meeting. FHWA contact: shari.schaftlein@dot.gov
- I. CSS Sessions - ITE Technical Conference “Transportation Solutions for the Real World”**. Today transportation professionals find themselves working in a complex world striving to balance the needs of a broad range of transportation users within diverse neighborhoods and contexts. The goal of this conference was to bring together transportation professionals, urban designers, and community advocate interests in a collaborative environment to foster mutual understanding and learning about improving the transportation systems to meet mobility and community needs. FHWA sponsored the inclusion of several special sessions that focused on CSS topics. The conference was held in San Antonio, TX,

March 19-22, 2006. For information and papers submitted for the sessions contact <http://www.ite.org/Conference/> FHWA contact: barbara.bauer@dot.gov

- J. AASHTO 2006 National CSS Conference** - The 1998 conference “*Thinking Beyond the Pavement*” codified the new transportation ethic of incorporating design measures into the transportation planning process that enhance communities and natural environments while continuing to accommodate the safe movement of motor vehicles. Key principles for Context Sensitive Design (CSD), now known as Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS), were adopted at this conference. The goals of the conference will be: to reaffirm the CSS definition and principles from the 1998 conference; share state DOT successes in CSS implementation; identify the issues and challenges to CSS implementation, and; establish a recommitment to moving forward and advancing CSS implementation. FHWA contacts: jon.obenberger@dot.gov and harold.peaks@dot.gov
- K. Support for AASHTO CSS Peer-to-Peer Training** - Based on the results of the National Survey, the CSS Competition, and knowledge of the current status of state CSS implementation garnered from the Conference, State to State Peer Exchanges will be organized. States will be matched that are at various stages of the performance continuum relative to design, public involvement, policy issues, environmental issues, staff development and training, and project management. The Goals of the training *format* include: maximize interactive discussions; use small-group learning that is personal and specific; use real-life situations, projects, problems, and solutions; and, ensure interaction between various disciplines with the DOTs. Contact: seggleston@ashto.org
- L. Development and publication of an Integrating CSS in Construction State-of-the-Practice Report** - The Kentucky Transportation Institute (KTI) at the University of Kentucky, in partnership with Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KTC) and the FHWA, will develop and deliver an Integrating CSS in Construction State-of-the-practice Report. The targeted delivery of this report is Summer 2006. FHWA contact: keith.moore@dot.gov
- M. CSS Performance** – FHWA continues to evolve guidance materials to evaluate and assess the implementation of CSS concepts and principles within organizations and project development processes. FHWA will use the results of this information in discussions with field offices and other stakeholders and to assist in future planning. FHWA contact: barbara.bauer@dot.gov
- N. Integration of CSS into NHI and FHWA Training Courses** – The Center for Transportation and the Environment (CTE), based at North Carolina State University, working in conjunction with FHWA will to do a review of at least two existing NHI courses selected by FHWA and provide recommendations and revisions that incorporate CSS concepts into the trainings taught by NHI. FHWA contact: keith.moore@dot.gov
- O. CSS National Dialog** - FHWA will be convening on the development and advancement of a CSS National Dialog that will include discussions of the current national status of CSS and expanding partnership opportunities with other stakeholders in the industry. This activity is expected to build off of dialogs initiated at conferences taken place in 2006 with AASHTO,

ITE and ASCE. Initial discussions are expected to occur in the fall of 2006. FHWA contacts: shari.schaftlein@dot.gov and keith.moore@dot.gov

- P. Green Highway Initiative (GHI)** - The first Mid-Atlantic Green Highways Forum was held on November 8 – 10, 2005 at the Marriott Inn and Conference Center at the University of Maryland in College Park. The GHI was created to promote innovative streamlining and market-based approaches to meet transportation needs while promoting environmental stewardship. The GHI supports the principles and concepts of CSS. Initially, seeking to develop strong partnerships in the Mid-Atlantic states, with a particular focus on watershed management, recycling, and ecosystem management, the GHI emphasis is on voluntary efforts, partnerships, and a rewards/recognition program for those who participate. Based on experience in the Mid-Atlantic, the initiative could be expanded to all states, and encompass a broader array of Green Highway practices. The Forum was co-hosted by the EPA and FHWA, in partnership with other public and private organizations. FHWA contacts: shari.schaftlein@dot.gov, jason.Harrington@dot.gov, keith.moore@dot.gov or contact the Green Highways Initiative website at <http://www.greenhighways.org/>
- Q. CSS Primer and Outreach Materials** – This project will produce several types of materials to be used by federal, state and local agencies as well as professional organizations to aid in CSS awareness training. The objective of the material is to raise transportation practitioner's awareness of CSS philosophy, principles and opportunities where these principles may be applied institutionally and throughout the life cycle of a transportation improvement project. Products to be produced include a Primer identifying the benefits and value of institutional integration of CSS, Power Point Presentation that provides an overview of CSS, CSS Tri-Fold Brochure intended for a wider audience, Questions and Answers document intended for a non-technical audience, and other outreach support material to be determined. The project is scheduled to be complete and products available by Winter 06/07 FHWA contact: jon.obenberger@dot.gov
- R. Federal Lands Highway - Guanella Pass CSS Lessons Learned Video** – This 30-minute DVD entitled “Thinking Beyond the Pavement” explains how CSS approach was used to facilitate delivery of one of CFLHD's most difficult and challenging projects. The video explains CSS principles in general and how they were successfully applied on this Colorado Forest Highway project. The DVD will be distributed as educational tool. The video features diverse project stakeholders explaining, in their own words, the challenges that were faced and overcome, and provides valuable lessons learned to assist other agencies faced with similar challenges. After the project's Draft EIS and any of the proposed alternatives failed to generate support, and agreement for a project seriously in doubt, the project team restarted the process by re-thinking the project purpose and need, applying greater flexibility to the design, and began a structured decision-making process with improved communication and collaboration approach. This ultimately proved successful in crafting a new alternative that could be supported with a Final EIS/ROD, and is currently under construction. The video is now in final editing and is scheduled for distribution in September 2006. The project website is <http://www.cflhd.gov/projects/co/guanella/index.cfm>. FHWA contacts: mark.taylor@dot.gov, jennifer.corwin@dot.gov and charles.luedders@dot.gov

- S. CSS Self-Assessment Guide & Workshop** – This project will develop a technical assistance guide and self-assessment tool to assist agencies with assessing their progress with advancing CSS integration. It will assist agencies in assessing how the CSS philosophy and principles have been institutionally integrated within their agency and progress with advancing the application of these principles in all aspects of planning and project development. This project includes development of outreach material and workshops including a one-day workshop to provide guidance to agency managers and a one-day workshop to provide guidance to practitioners on how to work with the assessment tool. The draft guide, assessment tool and outreach material will be available in late 2007. The workshops will be developed per feedback received on the guide and tool. FHWA contact: barbara.bauer@dot.gov
- T. CSS Webinars to Raise ITE Members Awareness** - This is a series of webinars that highlight key opportunities for agencies to implement CSS, facilitate CSS focused sessions at ITE district meetings and obtain feedback at these meetings on changes needed to the ITE Recommended Practice document, CSS in Designing Major Urban Thoroughfares for Walkable Communities. ITE will also develop a white paper identifying opportunities for ITE members to advance the implementation of CSS, what type of resources may be needed in a CSS toolbox, along with activities to advance CSS within ITE Technical Committees. FHWA contacts: danyell.digs@dot.gov and barbara.bauer@dot.gov
- U. CSS Training Assessment, Guide and Action Plan** - This project includes the development of a synthesis and summary of current training and outreach activity industry-wide; an accounting of perceived or actual changes at individual and organizational levels in attitudes and behavior as a result of participating in the training, and; a framework for agencies to consider for systematically addressing professional capacity building. The CSS Training Action Plan is a multi-year strategy and plan for training and outreach professional capacity building within FHWA. This project is expected to be completed and information available by spring 2008. FHWA contact: barbara.bauer@dot.gov